

# Surgery of the Stone Age

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## A BALLAD OF NEOLITHIC TIMES

BY

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## Surgery in the Stone Age.

[*A ballad of Neolithic times.*]

IN prehistoric days long since  
There lived a Medicine-Man,  
The general practitioner  
Of a primeval clan.

A dolichocephalic head  
Bespoke ancestral race ;  
A shaggy beard, which all afeard,  
Completely hid his face.

But peering through that veil of  
hair  
Were two black, beady eyes,  
To one not quite expecting it  
A matter of surprise.

This Neolithic Medicine-Man  
Held consultations free ;  
At sunrise, just outside his hut,  
His panel you might see.

They came by ones, they came  
by twos,  
They came by threes and fours ;  
No matter what their illness was  
They had to know the cause.

When they were all assembled  
there,  
The Medicine-Man appeared ;  
A silence fell on all around.  
(I thought they would have  
cheered.)

He looked them up ; he looked  
them down ;  
They all turned round about.  
His ordering eye directed them,  
Of that there was no doubt.

He made a sign all seemed to  
know  
And some fell promptly out—  
Those under spells, in witchcraft  
hells,  
Their demons he must rout.

They stood a little group apart,  
Till one fell in a fit.  
I seemed to see him rub his hands.  
(He had a cure for it.)

“This patient must be *now*  
trephined,  
Let all the others go ;  
To-morrow when the sun is up  
My magic I'll them show.”

Two men the epileptic bore  
And laid him on a trunk,  
And when the wretch was coming  
round  
He showed some signs of funk.

No questions put they to the man ;  
 The doctor cleared his throat,  
 Then, bringing flints from out his  
     hut,  
 Took off his hairy coat.

A crowd had gathered all around,  
 To watch the bloody deed ;  
 Their curiosity was stirred  
 To see his devil freed.

With sharp flint flake the surgeon  
     made  
 A cruciform incision ;  
 The blood did spurt, the wound  
     it hurt,  
 The crowd laughed in derision.

The two assistants pressed the  
     flaps  
 To stop the blood from running ;  
 The Medicine-Man did scheme  
     and plan,  
 He was so full of cunning.

He scraped the pericranium  
     Until the skull was bare ;  
 Then scratched the bone with a  
     sharp stone,  
 It did not matter where.

He scraped that bone and  
     scratched and scraped,—  
 The scratches made a groove,  
 The groove a basin-like ellipse.  
 The patient did not move.

The fact was this, when he came  
     round  
 So rotten did he feel,  
 He fainted when he found himself  
     The centre of such zeal.

The hollow soon became a hole,  
 'Twas all but through the bone,  
 His diploë, you well might see,  
 But still he made no moan.

The inner table only now  
     Protected his soft brain,  
 One final scrape and he did make  
     That hole a window-pane.

The devil stirred within his skull  
     And, with a fearful yell,  
 Escaped from out its prison-house  
     To seek its own in hell.

The crowd excited by that yell  
     Began to sing and dance ;  
 You might have thought the  
     Germans were  
 A-running out of France.

The surgeon stood and looked  
     around  
 And silence once more fell ;  
 Success was his, it was "good  
     biz,"  
 The demon was in hell.

The two assistants placed the flaps  
     Upon the new-made hole,  
 Delighted they had helped to save  
     The epileptic's soul.

They dressed the wound with  
     fresh green leaves,  
 Thin bark on this they laid,  
 And bound it round with long  
     dry grass.  
 (I wonder if it stayed.)

Triumphantly they carried him  
     To a sequestered cave,  
 And there they did the best they  
     could  
 To keep him from his grave.

By great good fortune he pulled  
     round  
 Without a septic trace,  
 And in a fortnight he was out  
     With smiles upon his face.

The tribe came out to welcome  
him  
And pedestaled him high.  
Trephined and epileptic both !  
It made the envious sigh.

And others jealous of his place,  
(Not epileptics they),  
Forthwith went to that Medicine-  
Man  
To be trephined straightway.

And this now famous Magic-Man  
Made riches more and more ;  
Trephined the young, trephined  
the old,  
Trephined them by the score.

[The skull of one of these you'll see  
In our fair London city,  
Lancaster House, *late* Stafford  
House.  
(The change I think a pity.)]


He lived this epileptic did,  
They all thought him divine ;  
They brought him goats and  
cheese and fruit,  
They deluged him with wine.

He was so great that others  
wished  
To be like him, divine,  
If epileptics they were not—  
There still was the trephine.

And that accounts for all those  
skulls  
With artificial holes,  
We find in Neolithic caves.  
They wished to save their souls.

If great they were upon this earth,  
Far better it would be  
For them in that fair hunting  
ground  
Of immortality !





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